

Ruth 1 — From Emptiness to Hope

Teaching Handout

Background of the Book

- Occurs during the days of the Judges
- Historical narrative written with theological purpose
- Short story designed to teach and encourage faith

Major themes of Ruth

- Emptiness → fullness
- Cost of disobedience
- God's sovereignty
- Faithful living
- Redemption

Chapter 1 Overview

A Story of Progressive Loss

A famine entices a family to leave Bethlehem and settle in Moab. Their attempt to escape hardship leads instead to deeper loss.

Key irony:

Bethlehem = "*House of Bread*," yet there is famine.

I. Leaving the Promised Land (1:1–2)

Bethlehem

- Region previously marked by civil conflict (Judges 19)

Moab

- Descendants of Lot (Gen 19:37)

- Foreign nation with different religion and customs

Names and meanings

- Elimelech — *My God is King*
- Naomi — *pleasant*
- Mahlon — *frail*
- Chilion — *weak*

Spiritual contradiction

A man named “*My God is King*” abandons God’s land. To “sojourn” there, i.e., temporary.

Loss #1 — Trust in God’s provision

- Took matters into his own hands
- Chose the “easier way”
- Sin promises relief but produces pain; promises ease but eventually more costly.

II. Permanent Settlement (1:3)

“They remained there.”

This was no temporary refuge — it became a lifestyle.

Loss #2 — Death of the husband: never part of the plan

- Naomi left vulnerable
- Family leadership collapses

Principle:

Poor spiritual decisions expose families to danger.

III. Forbidden Marriages (1:4)

Sons marry Moabite women.

Likely motivations:

- Stabilize the family
- Guarantee heirs

- Provide for their mother

Loss #3 — Covenant identity weakened

- Ten years in foreign land
- Hebrew identity and heritage compromised

Names

- Orpah — firmness of neck / stiff-necked
- Ruth — friendship / refreshment

Principle:

If parents disregard covenant faith, children rarely restore it.

IV. Total Collapse (1:5)

“The woman was left without.”

Loss #4 — Both sons die

No heirs, no protection

Loss #5 — Naomi loses identity and future

Reduced to “*the woman*”

Loss #6 — Stability destroyed

Moab promised security

Moab delivered emptiness

Principle:

Sin takes you farther than expected

Costs more than intended

Keeps you longer than desired

V. The Turning Point (1:6)

“She arose... for she heard.”

Hope begins when Naomi hears good news.

Loss #7 — Desire for foreign land broken

Parallel: Luke 15:17–20

The prodigal “*came to himself,*” v. 18 “*I will arise and go to my father,*” v.20 “*and he arose and came to his father.*”

Good news:

“The Lord had visited His people.”

- God is still active
- God restores
- Return is possible

Principle:

There is always more in the Father’s house than in the world, and all can “return.”

Key Lessons from Ruth 1

- Crisis reveals what we truly trust
- Running from hardship multiplies loss
- Sin damages generations
- Identity apart from God collapses
- Emptiness prepares the heart for grace
- Redemption begins with hearing and returning

Reflection Questions

1. Where am I choosing the “easier way” over obedience?
2. How do my decisions affect those under my care?
3. Have I allowed comfort to replace covenant faithfulness?
4. What losses is God using to call me home?
5. Do I believe return is always possible with God?